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September 15, 2008

Our office has a collection of Town Annual Reports that includes the Pelham Report from 1908—a 100 year old "snapshot" of what we once were. A few excerpts remind us of how society, schools and our towns have changed—and we are sure that 100 years from now the changes will be as dramatic.

# 1908 Pelham Town Report Excerpts:

- "We have great difficulty in securing teachers who are willing to accept positions in rural schools."
- "It is the duty of the teacher and parent... to teach students to 'abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good so there will be no room for bad.""
- "Medical Inspection: Of the 74 students tested, 12 were found to be defective and 10 parents were notified by the school physician."
- "Some children can read music and 'carry a part' very well."
- "Music has a moral and wholesome effect on the pupils and contributes to the refinement of taste in the community."
- "There are now eight students attending high school. Next June we expect a class of four or five."

As one-year Co-Interim Superintendents for 2008-2009, our 2007-2008 report to the citizens of Amherst is essentially derived from and based on the writings and observations of the previous Superintendent, Dr. Jere Hochman, and various school departments. Amherst Public Schools are actively engaged in an ambitious mission. We are committed to the achievement and success of every student, every day—and in every way. We aspire to student achievement of high-status knowledge and skills, with a curriculum that maintains high academic standards delivered with instructional strategies that are experiential, progressive and research-based. We aspire to high levels of professionalism within the mandates of federal and state regulations. We aspire to guarantee all the standards of safety, management and fiscal responsibility.

We work as a public entity regulated by law, educational codes, School Committee policy and district and school guidelines. We utilize independent audits, external program reviews, and many internal, routine checks and balances of our school system. Our district goals are derived from needs determined by our School Committee, in partnership with school site faculties and councils, staff, administrators, and with public input. Our district goals and school site goals are available at all school offices and are currently posted on our website, www.arps.org.

We continue to examine every department of our three school districts. We have reviewed policy and procedures in human resources, the business office, facilities, technology, professional development,

curriculum, student services, and all areas of administration and accountability. The district central office has been reorganized and there have been changes in personnel to better support our schools.

Over the past few years, we have experienced considerable change in both federal and state regulations. These government intentions, although not always well matched to all our needs, have merit and we have focused on those areas needing our attention. Organizationally, our schools are surrounded by three entities of the organization: curriculum, student services, and operations. Each of these areas is guided by a set of assumptions and beliefs and, more directly, by standards and expectations.

Our district operations include facilities, the business office, human resources, and information systems and technology. The facilities department coordinates transportation, maintenance, and general facilities operations. Ron Bohonowicz began his work as Director of Facilities in July, 2006. Unique to this position is that Mr. Bohonowicz works for both the schools and Town, 80% and 20% respectively. Rob Detweiller serves as Director of Finance and Operations. Kathryn Mazur has the full time responsibility of coordinating and directing Human Resources. Jerry Champagne continues as Director of Information Systems.

All of these departments continue to review policies and procedures, working toward increased service orientation, and implementing and improving numerous systems and procedures. This includes continued implementation of technology, including upgraded software systems in our business operation (MUNIS), student information systems (Power School), a data warehouse (Cognos), and a comprehensive personnel management system (Kronos).

Our work in curriculum development and supervision has been in transition as we reconcile efforts with the federal and state expectations, balanced with the school site autonomy that has been valued in Amherst for decades. Dr. Wendy Kohler, who retired in August 2008, was responsible for work in this area. Her work in grants (entitlement and competitive); development and supervision of many district-wide programs in relation to town agencies and the colleges and universities; and work in all curriculum areas, specifically focused on mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and social justice was redistributed among staff. Fran Ziperstein, Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, and Mike Hayes, District Curriculum, will be one-year interim replacements to handle many of her duties.

A major development in coordinating efforts and fostering efficiency has been in the area of Student Services. Maria Geryk continues her work as Director of Student Services. Student Services provides guidance and coordination in two major areas: 1) student information and compliance with regulations and 2) services and programs for students. The latter includes special education, English language education for students whose first language is not English, guidance and counseling, health services, early childhood, outreach, Title I (reading and mathematics intervention), out-of-district programs for students, and others.

Complimenting all of these efforts is our work with Town departments, Town businesses and agencies, the colleges and University, and others. The response and dedication for our students and organization have been wonderful. Efforts in safety and security in conjunction with the Amherst Police and the Amherst Fire Department are noteworthy. Our school/town "Fields Committee" meets monthly to coordinate efforts in facility use, fields use, activities, recreation, and athletics. The colleges and University have all provided support in terms of student interns, volunteers, work on service projects, curriculum coordination, and other targeted efforts. The list of partnerships and coordinated efforts is quite lengthy, productive and growing in number.

While we have worked to become more efficient in our organization and operation as well as to address our ambitious goals, we find ourselves doing so with a budget that comes no where close to supporting the needs. Our intentional efforts in energy management, freezing department resources, limiting hiring and programs, and other measures of cost containment are still not sufficient in addressing the restrictions on our budget. Funding for federal programs has been reduced again this year. State funding has still not returned us to service levels of previous years. Town funding has been constrained for reasons clarified elsewhere in this report. Community expectations for educational services remain high, even as budgets and staffing are reduced.

As the 2007-2008 school year began, we again found ourselves opening school with increased class sizes, reduced staffing, and decreases in numerous budget supply and program lines. We opened school with continued determination to ensure efficiency and compliance with regulations, increased organizational capacity, and professional growth and development.

As the 2008-2009 school year proceeds, we will produce updates and reports on many areas of our work, all of which should guide the development of our budget. We hope you will subscribe to our periodic update of district events at <a href="mailto:learning@arps.org">learning@arps.org</a>. Just send an email to that address and we will add you to the list. We post all information about our budget efforts as they proceed and other district information on our website <a href="mailto:www.arps.org">www.arps.org</a>. You can also access all individual school websites through that site. We are actively pursuing plans to upgrade and make our electronic communications more timely, useful and informative. We appreciate public input on changes and improvements to our communication systems that would both inform and engage our stakeholders. An overview of our district goals and initiatives this year, many of which have implications for the FY 09 budget, are posted on our district website under the Superintendents link.

Let us use the words of A. L. Hardy, the 1908 Superintendent, to help express our thoughts. One hundred years ago, he closed his report by saying, "Personally, it is a great pleasure to me to work with and for the boys and girls of Pelham, and if I can help them to be better boys and girls, better men and women, noble, true, self-respecting citizens, then I certainly shall have my reward."

We appreciate the opportunity to work with and for the citizens and children of Amherst and the Region, and we continue to thank you for your ongoing support and sincere interest in our children and our schools. We find lots of energy and expertise in our school community as a whole. When we focus our energy and expertise on providing excellence, equity and opportunity to all students, every day, we achieve greatness.

Sincerely,

Al Sprague Co-Superintendent Helen Vivian Co-Superintendent

## THE AMHERST PUBLIC AND AMHERST-PELHAM REGIONAL SCHOOLS

Fiscal Year 2008

## AMHERST PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT:

**Amherst School Committee** 

Andy Churchill, Chair Elaine Brighty, Vice-Chair Sonia Correa Pope, Secretary Kathleen Anderson Catherine Sanderson

The Amherst School Committee is an elected body responsible for the public education of all children in kindergarten through grade six and of pre-school children with substantial special needs in our community. The Committee meets regularly on the third Tuesday of each month and welcomes citizen participation at each meeting. The members of this committee also serve as Amherst's members of the Regional School Committee which has responsibility for the educational programs for children in grades seven through twelve.

#### STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Student enrollment as of October 1, 2007 was:

1	<u>STUDENTS</u>
	74
	176
	185
	179
	205
	194
	201
	<u>196</u>
TOTAL	1,410

Twenty-three children from Amherst attended other school districts under the School Choice program.

## AMHERST-PELHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee

Michael Hussin, Chairperson (Pelham)

Marianne Jorgensen, Vice-Chairperson (Shutesbury)

Michael Katz, Secretary (Leverett)

Sonia Correa Pope, (Amherst)

Andy Churchill (Amherst)

Elaine Brighty, (Amherst)

Kathleen Anderson (Amherst)

Maureen Ecclestone (Pelham)

Catherine Sanderson (Amherst)

The Regional School Committee represents the four communities that comprise the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District: Amherst, Pelham, Leverett, and Shutesbury. It is responsible for the direction and support of the educational programs for students in Grades 7 through 12 from each of these towns. Committee meetings are open to the public, except for executive sessions as prescribed by law, and are

held twice-monthly on Tuesday evenings. Opportunity is available at every meeting for public participation.

## **STUDENTS**

Enrollment in the Regional Middle and Senior High Schools as of October 1, 2007 decreased by 36 students. Enrollments on October 1 over the last ten years were as follows:

1997-1998—1937	2002-2003—2032
1998-1999—2007	2003-2004—2043
1999-2000—2017	2004-2005—1921
2000-2001—2044	2005-2006—1924
2001-2002—2068	2006-2007—1853

In addition, 34 Regional students were enrolled in Vocational Schools as of October 1, 2007. Fourteen students attended other school districts under the State's School Choice Program, and 55 students were enrolled at charter schools. Tuition for district students to attend these schools is paid by the Regional School District.

As of April 18, 2008 when this report was prepared, enrollment in the Regional Middle and Senior High Schools was as follows:

2007-2008

2007 2000							
Grade	Amherst	Pelham	Leverett	Shutesbury	Wards	Tuition	Total
7	217	18	27	19	-	7	288
8	219	18	16	21	-	11	285
9	237	17	21	16	-	20	311
10	227	16	14	22	-	20	299
11	226	22	20	25	-	15	308
12	198	21	22	27	-	30	298
TOTALS	1,324	112	120	130		103	1,789

There were 193 students from Amherst who graduated with the class of 2008.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The instructional program, developed by teachers in all areas of the curriculum, reflects the overall philosophy and goals of education established by the School Committee. An appropriate range of support services remains in place to help students achieve their highest possible potential. Included among these programs are Guidance, Health Services, Special Education, and English Language Learners Program.

Amherst–Pelham Regional High School is a four-year comprehensive school and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The student body of the High School and Middle School is culturally diverse with a population that includes 69% Caucasian, 9% African-American, 8% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 4% multi-racial and includes native speakers of 23 languages. Masters or doctoral degrees are held by 85% of the faculty.

The students in the Regional schools work hard and excel. For the 2007-2008 school year, the high school had 25 National Merit Commendations and 3 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists who received Certificates of Merit, in a class of 314 students. Ninety-one percent of our students will pursue higher education at colleges and universities across the nation after graduation from the Amherst Regional High School. Nationally normed standardized testing results reflect that, overall, our students score significantly above grade level in all areas tested. Students consistently enroll in courses beyond the standard graduation requirements.

## PRIMARY GOALS FOR THE AMHERST AND REGIONAL SCHOOLS

- 1. Developing and maintaining an up-to-date, innovative, multicultural, academically challenging curriculum that promotes high standards and success for all students.
- 2. Providing creative, multi-faceted instruction that maintains high standards, engages all students, and enables all students to be successful learners.
- 3. Making all students feel fully welcome and a part of our schools, regardless of race, class, gender, language, religion, sexuality, culture, academic success, or physical abilities.
- 4. Eliminating the achievement gap among students from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- 5. Addressing the demands and opportunities facing our schools as a result of the rapid growth in the use of technology throughout our society.
- 6. Increasing communication and collaboration among the district's stakeholders students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and the larger community and using parents and the community more effectively as educational resources.
- 7. Hiring and retaining a high quality teaching and administrative staff.
- 8. Equipping and maintaining school buildings to provide healthy, accessible, modern learning environments that support the achievement of our mission.
- 9. Sustaining a physically and emotionally safe environment in our schools for students and staff.

There were several matters to which the Regional School Committee and the Superintendent gave considerable attention:

# AMHERST AND AMHERST-PELHAM REGIONAL SCHOOLS HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

#### **Business Office**

The business office is responsible for the business practices of the school systems. Business office staff ensure that staff are paid on time; oversee all purchasing and contracting; provide accounting and cash management; ensure accountability and legal compliance; produce reports for the State, School Committees, Towns, and working groups; conduct routine internal audits of the business functions of the schools and support audits by outside independent auditors; produce annual budgets for each of the three school districts; and monitor and perform financial analysis of all district programs.

# **2007-2008 Highlights**

- The Accounts Payable staff pays nearly 10,000 invoices per fiscal year for the three districts combined.
- The Payroll staff issued more than 23,000 paychecks or direct deposits last year.
- The Director of Finance and Operations oversees three budgets totaling \$48,498,750 for fiscal year 2008.
- The Amherst-Pelham Regional School District received a Standard & Poor's rating of "A+" as part of the bond refinancing process for fiscal year 2007.

#### **2007-2008 Initiatives**

- Reviewed and updated Finance and Operations policies
- Selected and contracted a Food Services Management Company, Whitsons, through a Request For Proposal (RFP) process
- Convened a Regional Agreement subcommittee to recommend a method to allocate transportation costs in compliance with state requirements
- Implemented new 403(b) regulations issued by the IRS affecting employee tax deferred retirement plans
- Developed a plan for the implementation of GASB#45 by FY 09, changing the method of reporting for non-pension other post-employment benefits (OPEB).

## **Curriculum and Program Development Office**

The primary function of this office is to oversee the articulation of K-12 curriculum and to provide oversight for new program initiatives (for both students and staff) in the three school districts. The other primary function of this office is the programmatic as well as financial oversight of all grants awarded to the districts.

## **2007-2008 Highlights**

- Publication of K-12 curriculum guides in mathematics, English/language arts, and science
- Implementation of a pilot "Pipeline Project" initiative in collaboration with Amherst College (a school year plus summer program of academic tutoring and mentoring).
- Procurement of four new competitive grants: Academic support initiatives (two), Chinese

- language instruction, expanded time in learning (planning grant).
- In the 2006-2007 school year, thirty-six grants were awarded to the school districts for a total exceeding 2.5 million dollars. Of the total funding, approximately 1.8 million dollars went to pay the salary (either full or portion) of over 90 teachers, paraprofessionals, and clerical staff.
- Twenty-five new district professional development workshop offerings announced this fall.
- New teacher mentoring/induction program provides district-wide as well as building-based support for teachers in their first three years in the district.
- The recommendations of the math program review committee will be presented to the Superintendent this fall.
- Established Chinese language instruction (grades K-6) at Wildwood elementary school.
- Each year the program office processes over one hundred requests from out-of-district groups to rent school facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, etc.).

#### **2007-2008** Initiatives

- Gathered data and oversaw the full district EQA (Educational Quality Assessment) audit.
- Oversaw the on-going review, revision, and evaluation of curricula/programs.
- Developed a sustainable model for the "Pipeline Project" initiative in collaboration with Amherst College.
- Oversaw multi-level initiatives related to Chinese instruction in the schools (FLAP grant).
- Organized study groups and established protocols for the exploration of expanded time on learning in the elementary schools.

# **Facilities Department**

The Facilities Department is responsible for the maintenance and protection of assets for nine buildings in the Amherst, Pelham and Regional Schools. The Transportation Department operates and maintains a fleet of nine school buses and fourteen school vans, which provide daily transportation for students both in Amherst and in out-of-district special education placements.

## **2007-2008 Highlights**

- A back up generator was installed for the Information System computer system, which will provide emergency power to support critical phone and data access in emergencies.
- The specification and procurement process was completed to purchase four new transportation vehicles needed to replace vehicles that no longer met safety and operational standards. These vehicles were specified to maximize student safety as well as to maintain energy standards.
- The high school security system was upgraded, adding more protection to the computer rooms, library and cafeteria; the areas that house the most valuable materials and equipment.
- In the past year, the department completed 1,337 work orders from district staff to repair or alter buildings and equipment. All this was done while maintaining a safe learning environment for our students and staff.
- Nine school buses and fourteen vans drove 281,688 miles in the 2006-2007 school year.

### **2007-2008 Initiatives**

- Expanded security measures in all district facilities.
- Managed energy usage to minimize costs to the district.
- Developed a long-range capital plan to improve the facilities and transportation infrastructure, which will create a better learning environment for all students.

# **Human Resources Department**

The district Human Resources department provides quality leadership and guidance in the development, implementation, and administration of human resources related policies, practices, and procedures in a professional, caring, and consistent manner in order to provide an equitable and positive work environment for all district employees.

# **2007-2008 Highlights**

- Completed core implementation of Kronos Workforce HR, a human resources software
  product that maintains and has reporting capacity for all employee information, including
  personal demographic, position and assignment demographic, individual development and
  certification, and contains the fields required to comply with Massachusetts Department of
  Education mandated reporting.
- Collected and electronically recorded demographic, education and licensure information for all staff, permanent and temporary workers, to comply with new State and Federal initiatives.
- Completed roll out of Kronos Self Service, a component accessible by all employees to track their individual employment information and benefits.
- Utilized Self-Service with all employees to conduct three mandatory on-line "surveys" to assure and record employee compliance with our revised Employee Handbook, district expectations, and to update emergency contact information for all staff.
- Worked with Student Services Office in developing a new employee orientation program.

## **2007-2008 Initiatives**

- Contracted negotiations were completed for all individual district units; administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, clerical, custodial, and maintenance staff.
- Five key administrative positions were filled within the district, including three elementary principals, one middle school principal, and an interim superintendent of schools.
- In addition to conducting paper-based Exit Interviews, "Stay" interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators of color to support district retention efforts.

## **Information Systems**

Information Systems has the responsibility for all electronic software and hardware systems spanning three school districts and ten buildings. Duties include the installation and maintenance of all computer-related infrastructure (servers, switches, cabling, operating systems), user and email accounts, Web Server, email system, desktop computers, networked printers, digital projectors, scanners, digital cameras, all software (curriculum and central office) and the districts-wide digital telephone system.

## **2007-2008 Highlights**

- Amherst's participation in the state-wide Educational Data Warehouse (EDW) has been implemented.
- A Web-based grade book system for teachers has been installed.
- The Connect-Ed emergency contact and notification system was implemented and all administrative staff were trained in its use.
- Study Island MCAS preparation software for math was installed and implemented.
- Through a partnership with the Town of Amherst, increased high-speed internet connections by ten-fold when the Five-College fiber network came online in September.

- The department manages and maintains more than 15 databases of student and staff data for the three districts, as well as 1,818 student email and network accounts.
- After the filters remove SPAM, more than 8,000 emails are received daily in the districts.
- The network systems have an average uptime of 99.9%.
- The department maintains more than two dozen file servers, 150 networked printers, 70 digital projectors, and 340 telephones.

## **2007-2008 Initiatives**

- Trained faculty and staff in the use of the Educational Data Warehouse as a data analysis tool in preparing and implementing student success plans.
- Began work to implement a Parent Portal, which will allow parents access to information regarding their children's grades and attendance information.
- Installed and implemented the Study Island MCAS preparation software for English and Science.

# **Student Services Department**

The Student Services Department supports the districts' work in meeting the varied profiles of all of our unique learners. Toward meeting the standard of high achievement for all of our students, this department is working on the development of structures/frameworks, procedures/protocols, student interventions and programs, and professional development opportunities. The goal is to provide the building-based staff the vehicle to gather information regarding the learning profiles of their students, and the tools necessary to differentiate and individualize instruction; to identify specific student needs; to develop and implement student-specific interventions; and to assess and monitor student outcomes.

# **2007-2008 Highlights**

- Successfully completed the Coordinated Program Review by the Department of Education, which included review of Special Education, English Learner Education, Civil Rights, Title I, and McKinney Vento.
- Expanded professional development opportunities for paraprofessional staff, van/bus drivers, cafeteria staff, professional staff, and administrators. The creation of professional development opportunities in digital format began, which offers greater access for staff.
- Strengthened communication with families and schools. Continued collaborative work with the Special Education Parents Advisory Council, including the hosting of the PAC website. Increased focus on consistency and alignment of policy and practice across all buildings and programs to support greater equity and clearer communication.
- Increased focus on the well-being of students and staff by implementing the work of the Responsiveness Committee. In addition, continued implementation of the trauma sensitive schools initiative, safe and drug free schools initiatives, and a more collaborative focus on anti-bullying and increasing social competency in our students.

#### **2007-2008 Initiatives**

- Continued the focus on high achievement for all students by supporting the work at the building level in identifying the needs of specific students and subgroups who require intervention, by implementing research based interventions, by monitoring response to these interventions, and by monitoring progress.
- Increased meaningful communication with families whose primary language is other than

- English, and supported implementation of translation protocols and access to interpreters.
- Continued development of a focused vision regarding the supports, services and professional development necessary to support the well-being of our students.
- Continued and expanded our work regarding school safety and crisis planning.